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## Panel: More progress needed on recommendations for sheriff's office

By Keith Ervin

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Sixteen months after the King County sheriff Blue Ribbon Panel outlined a plan to improve discipline and address misconduct by sheriff's deputies, the panel told the County Council today that little or no progress has been made on some of its key recommendations.

That finding was part of a progress report delivered by the panel's chair, former County Executive Randy Revelle, and the vice chairman, retired state Supreme Court Justice Faith Ireland.

The panelists said Sheriff Sue Rahr has taken important steps to improve the training and supervision of deputies. But because workplace issues are subject to collective bargaining, she has been unable to adopt performance standards for deputies, evaluate their performance or create an "early intervention system" to help troubled deputies deal with personal issues.

The county also has been unable to create an Office of Law Enforcement Oversight because that too, requires changes in the contract currently being negotiated with the King County Police Officers Guild, the panel says.

The panel has urged the county Charter Review Commission to propose a charter amendment that would allow the sheriff, rather than the county executive, to bargain working conditions with the union. The executive would continue to negotiate wages and benefits.

Revelle said the sheriff should have been given negotiating authority when voters made the position an elected office in 1997. Panelist Pat Stell, who served as President Clinton's Northwest regional representative for the U.S. Department of Labor, said the sheriff's lack of power has led to "the unfortunate rollover of the labor agreement for 10 years now."

The panel's report generally gave Rahr, Executive Ron Sims and the County Council high marks for funding and implementing changes that aren't subject to collective bargaining. Sims and the council have appropriated money to hire more supervising sergeants, improve training and operate the yet-to-be-created oversight office.

Panel members are worried about what kind of independent oversight office might emerge out of contract talks. "An oversight office with less authority or independence as recommended by the panel and enacted into law will not effectively serve the Sheriff's Office or the citizens of King County," the report declares.

The oversight office was at the heart of the Blue Ribbon Panel's original recommendations that it made to county officials in September 2006.

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